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Demos

THE EXILES OF MARCEL DUCHAMP

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OF MARCEL DUCHAMP

T. J. Demos

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For Zoë

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INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT WORK places the art of Marcel Duchamp in relation to the conditions of exile. Famous for his independence, expressed through a lifelong commitment to itinerancy, Duchamp remained possessed by what he called a “spirit of expatriation.” This provocative self-description has received its due within the many biographical treatments of Duchamp, which have plumbed the depths of his resolutely sovereign existence that expressed itself through perpetual wandering, refusal of traditional cultural conventions, and a committed antinationalist pacifism. But the challenge remains to take seriously this spirit of expatriation at the level of his artistic practice, the consideration of which is the ambition of this study.

Far from an all-encompassing monographic text, this book presents a series of interconnected and developed arguments about a particular set of projects by Duchamp. The principal works under consideration include the readymade constructions of the late 1910s and 1920s, the installation designs for the two surrealist exhibitions, one in Paris in 1938, the other in New York in 1942, and the “portable museum,” *La boîte-en-valise*, undertaken roughly between the years of 1935 and 1946. For the most part, Duchamp created these projects—selected here as case studies for their remarkable ability to manifest, define, and exploit the terms of exile—while the artist was living as an expatriate in New York, Buenos Aires, and occupied France, during catastrophic periods of world war and within cultural environments of hypertrophic nationalism. In response to these circumstances, Duchamp deployed an art of mobile objects and disjunctive spaces, constructing experimental

installations and mixed-media assemblages that were extremely sensitive to matters of location, framing, and (de)contextualization. These works not only express the experiential anguish of geopolitical displacement, but put that force of displacement to their own radical ends, modeling new modes of being released from the rigid structuring of identity. While the ways in which Duchamp's art acknowledged and challenged modern systems of discipline, including those of capitalism, gender formation, artistic production, and perception, have been rigorously and brilliantly analyzed,¹ his art's relation to exile and nationalism has again surprisingly gone unstudied. This relation serves here as the sustained object of attention.

Assuming several interrelated meanings in this study, exile first of all unfolds from the complex systems of displacement that materialized within Duchamp's artistic practice. By avoiding all forms of self-same identity, secure relation to place, and notions of ideal unity, which were culturally coded and exploited by the pressures of nationalism, Duchamp's practice functioned as an oppositional force, even while his definition of exile accrued highly differentiated meanings. Through it, he discovered the means to define an antinational political commitment and, more broadly, an ethical exigency to reject modernity's systems of regimentation at the levels of representation, subjectivity, and collective belonging—all of which concerned Duchamp deeply during these years. This analytic framework reveals the sometimes surprising affinities and

at other times irreconcilable differences between Duchamp's practice and the writings of Theodor Adorno, Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, André Breton, Jacques Lacan, André Malraux, and Raymond Roussel, among others, which compose a far-reaching, contemporaneous intellectual field within which forms of exile were systematically and diversely conceptualized and, in some cases, actively engaged politically. Through a historiographic approach

that places Duchamp's work in intimate connection with those theoretical practices, and also with the avant-garde projects of Dada and surrealism, this reading attempts to situate it all the more specifically in its cultural and historical frame, even while it struggles against whatever would locate it securely, whether that entails complacent interpretive conclusion or historical categorization. This tension—between the historian's will toward interpretive ends and art's resistance to final destinations—I hope remains alive within my text, which is pledged to forging a deeply analytical argument as much as it is dedicated, in turn, to respecting the very refusal of the arrest of meaning to which the most radical cultural projects of early twentieth-century modernity, and particularly the art of Duchamp are profoundly committed. I try to acknowledge throughout this study, additionally, that Duchamp's practice embodied and elaborated its own theoretical positions, thus defying any facile application of exterior formulations that might otherwise divert the endeavor to bring into proximity his art and the larger cultural and historical environment in which it operated.

Duchamp crystallized the experience of exile within the structural and phenomenological conditions of the artwork itself, sometimes by projecting it into a state of mobility, at other times by materializing an internal liminality. He also allegorized it through the critical internalization and experimental mobilization of photographic reproduction and museological conventions. The consideration of these two institutions—of photography and the museum—in relation to the historical avant-garde forms two sites of systematic inquiry here, which the first chapter engages historically through an examination of the contemporaneous theoretical projects of Walter Benjamin and André Malraux. While the consciousness of these museological and technological institutions has recently informed understandings of the critical dimension of modernist and

postmodernist art, Duchamp in fact invited these frameworks in to his field of practice early on and conceived them as historically constituted in relation to political and nation-state identity. These forms of institutionalization and technological reproducibility operated historically to define the national subject and generate new markets, which Duchamp's art variously exposes for analysis. But they also harbored forces that threatened the very dispersion of the self within a field of infinite exchangeability, both troubling the capitalist field and exacerbating the conditions of geopolitical displacement, which his work also put to critical task. Duchamp at once resisted the instrumentalization of identity within those institutions and internalized their structures for his own purposes. He employed photography and museums both to reconstitute a self against its complete loss in the face of dislocation and to pose its decentered status against nationalism's fanatical attempts to secure a unified subject and collective identity. Consequently, for Duchamp, exile took on a conflicted group of meanings, figuring as a sign of melancholy anguish as much as a vehicle of hopeful resistance. That Duchamp's art could pursue multiple courses at once—demonstrating both the capacity for an analytic recognition of the museum's and photography's wide range of functions and effects, and the ability to reroute them toward subversive ends—represents its wonderful complexity. This slippery doubleness also reveals his practice's remarkable agility in sustaining contradiction, sometimes at the deepest and most provocative levels, which this project aims not to resolve, but to open up productively.

There is no doubt that the confluence of recent historical developments over the last few decades has only increased the relevancy of exile as an object of study. Owing to our present position in the age of globalization—defined by growing and ever further differentiated forms of migration, the simultaneous rupture and

reenforcement of national boundaries, the continual advancement of deracinating communications technologies, and the planetary expansion of the institutions of economic inequality—exile has become an urgent topic to consider, and to reconsider historically. For some, it even suggests a new political program.² Invigorated by these historical turns, this book has also been energized by recent movements in installation-based artistic practice, conceptual forms of institutional critique, and experimental curatorial projects and exhibition designs from the 1960s forward, as well as by the art-historical attention that has lately been paid to them. Add to this assemblage of disciplines and practices the intertwined formations of poststructuralist analysis and postcolonial studies, which have also focused on national identity and exile, and there unfolds the expansive intellectual range that grants the subject of exile its extraordinary significance in contemporary culture and discourse and which motivates my own thinking. Yet the present work is by no means a mere reflection of, or even a methodical engagement with these framing conditions; rather, its ambition is to consider how Duchamp's spirit of expatriation animated his artistic practice in all of its historical specificity and conceptual reach, and to demonstrate and analyze with all due sensitivity its formal complexity, theoretical originality, and ethico-political significance within some of the darkest periods of twentieth-century modernity.

The book's first of four chapters examines Duchamp's "portable museum," *La boîte-en-valise*, a suitcase containing miniature reproductions of all his life's work up until the mid-1930s. This chapter assumes the task of opening up the study's problematic, preceding the discussion of chronologically earlier work because it represents the artist's most ambitious and expansive examination of the conditions of exile. Constructed during World War II and during Duchamp's own corresponding dislocation, *La boîte-en-valise*

parsed the demands of exile and geographical mobility within its complex material structure. Its portability, collapsible status, and deracinated photographic condition anticipated and fulfilled the requirements that accompanied the forced exodus from northern France in May 1940, when Duchamp, like thousands of others, fled the Nazi invasion of Paris and became a refugee. But more than merely responsive to those traumatic events, the suitcase represents an extensive meditation upon modern art's tendency toward itinerancy, by which Duchamp correlated the *Boîte's* interior structures with emerging market forces, exhibition imperatives, and technological advances in reproducibility.

For Walter Benjamin, who also fled Paris in the summer of 1940, photography accelerated art's exhibition value through its reproductive dispersal, which critically negated traditional conventions of originality, secure location, and ritualized reception that might otherwise guarantee the collective belonging that had become increasingly problematic during the 1930s. Through it, remarkably, Benjamin articulated his own experience of exile. This homology between geopolitical displacement and reproductive dispersal resonates profoundly with Duchamp's traveling suitcase. Duchamp's project also intersects with specific modern developments of the museum and its use of photography, particularly as evidenced in Malraux's writings in the 1930s, later culminating in his book, *Le musée imaginaire*. Malraux's "museum without walls," as it was translated in English, represents a further instance of dislocation mediated by museological decontextualization (one very different from Benjamin's model), which I compare and contrast to Duchamp's "portable museum." For Duchamp, the embrace of these forces of dislocation within exile became both a means to shore up a precarious subjectivity and a sign of its ineluctable dispersal. While this conclusion suggests a certain paradox, such ten-

sion reveals precisely the unyielding multivalence and conceptual mobility of Duchamp's practice that refuses the complacency of easy resolution or any final resting place.

The second chapter looks back to Duchamp's self-professed "spirit of expatriation" around World War I, particularly in terms of how it infused his *Sculptures for Traveling* of 1918, which he brought with him when he escaped what he perceived as the intolerable American nationalism in New York and fled to Buenos Aires. With these pieces, Duchamp intensified the structural decontextualization already present in his early readymades. His first readymades of 1913–14—such as the *Bottle Rack* or the *Bicycle Wheel*—internalized the circulatory mobility of objects within modern capitalism by inserting commercial objects into either the domestic economy of the home studio or the institutional context of the art gallery. The *Sculptures for Traveling*—the untitled string and rubber assemblage built from cut-up bathing caps and the *Small Glass*, both 1918—went further by approaching the terms of formal mutability in their very materiality, whereby the artwork unfolded to an endless relay between assemblage and architectural frame, artwork and everyday life, rendering each indeterminate in turn. My larger claim is that such a remarkably shifting artistic morphology allegorized a relationality that resisted the essentialism of identity; for Duchamp's "expatriation" represented a rupture with the entire organizational system of the modern construction of the subject (encoded in the root term "*pater*"), which reaches out to paternal authority, religious order, the patrimony of traditional artistic lineages, the hierarchy of labor, and the patriotism of nation-state identity. This matrix of disavowals—the refusal of national, religious, filial, and even identitarian models of the subject—links Duchamp's work with other Dadaist practices, and it picks up specifically on the writings of Raymond Roussel, who connected the

thematics of travel to the liberating structure of displacement within his prose. This chapter also considers the resonance between Duchamp's "expatriation" and what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term "deterritorialization," which names a process of escape from the disciplinary regimes of the family, capitalism, and nationalism. Yet Duchamp simultaneously avoided any naive utopianism suggested by the seeming promise of pure difference beyond capital by acknowledging, through the *Sculptures*' reassertion of the frame, that the artwork's expression—as much as the subject's definition—is ever open to new forms of capture.

Duchamp's experimental installation design for the 1938 Exposition internationale du surréalisme in Paris forms the subject of the third chapter. By hanging 1,200 coal sacks from the ceiling of the esteemed right-bank Galerie Beaux-Arts, Duchamp appeared to satisfy the surrealist mandate to hide the architectural traces of the bourgeois salon. After all, exhibiting at such a site presented intolerable contradictions to surrealism's oppositional political identity. But while Duchamp's installation made certain gestures toward this goal, its more profound achievement was to link the space of claustrophobic pressure to a threatening order of capitalist industrialization and institutionalization that was surrealism's condition of possibility. A further connection, one between fascist industry and capitalist exchange, was articulated in the concurrent projects of Bataille, and Adorno and Horkheimer, which offer the conceptual means to further define the historical stakes of Duchamp's installation. In confronting a mass of coal sacks that evoked so many gruesome bodies hung overhead, visitors to the surrealist exhibition encountered a horrific vision of a reified community imaged through an order of industrialized identity, in effect a striking portrayal of a community of death that expressed the grisly dangers of fascism and capitalism alike. In order to render

the contours of such a community, I draw on the contemporaneous theoretical work of Bataille, who also proposed forms of collective belonging alternative to fascist models. Redefining social being as heterogeneous—opposed to the homogeneity of fascism's ideal community—Bataille conceived a notion of collectivity founded upon sharing the very impossibility of immanence, which parallels Duchamp's formation of an experimental social space beneath the coal sacks.

The final chapter investigates Duchamp's installation design for the 1942 New York exhibition of surrealism in exile, "First Papers of Surrealism." By entangling the gallery in a mile of string, Duchamp threw the display of surrealist artwork into a disorienting labyrinth that announced the dislocated status many exiled surrealists wished to forget. Surrealism was in the course of responding to exile by building a vicarious home aesthetically, offering physical and psychic comfort to the displaced. It was precisely in order to redress its growing locational conflicts—between the movement's purported radicalism and its location in the bourgeois salon, between its exiled status and its increasing nostalgia for the home—that exhibition design, eminently concerned with *placement*, obtained the status it did within surrealism. One response that facilitated the surrealist desire to gain a new state of habitability took hold in Frederick Kiesler's contemporaneous exhibition design for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in New York, which figures as a revealing counterpoint to Duchamp's installation. Conversely, Duchamp's installation, viewed in relation to Bataille's theorizations of anti-architecture and decentered subjectivity, rejected the artistic flight toward homely comfort, the expression of which, in the most extreme cases, came dangerously close to fascism's own reactionary ideology of the mythical home. Instead, by assuming the location of the frame itself, Duchamp's

installation sensitized viewers to the institutional and discursive contexts that denied any metaphysical or idealist *heimlich* (or homely) experience, but rather threw surrealism even further into a state of disarray. The refusal to be at home even while at home, as Theodor Adorno had proclaimed in exile around 1944, became at once an antifascist ethics and an aesthetics of exile within Duchamp's practice.

1 THE PORTABLE MUSEUM

This seeking for my home . . . was my affliction. . . .

Where is—my home? I ask and seek and have
sought for it; I have not found it.

—WALTER BENJAMIN in exile, quoting Nietzsche, 1939¹

I have gone home . . . affectionately Marcel.

—MARCEL DUCHAMP in exile, 1940²

ON MAY 16, 1940, when it was clear that the Nazi advance on Paris was imminent, Marcel Duchamp escaped the city by train. He and his companion, Mary Reynolds, traveled south to the small seaside town of Arcachon, near Bordeaux, joining his sister Suzanne and her husband Jean Crotti. The German crossing of the Maginot Line along the upper border of France, once thought impenetrable, had initiated a mass exodus from the northern regions of the country, including Paris. The following month, regrouped in the south of France, Duchamp witnessed the continual circulation of German troops and fleeing refugees. "Many refugees from Belgium and the North have left and the Germans who come here are here 'to rest' (4 days by parcels of 4,000 at a time)," he reported to the Arensbergs, his American friends and patrons in New York. And in a letter to Beatrice Wood: "[I]t is very difficult for us to move about at the moment. But that will not last."³ Finding himself in the area classified as the occupied zone following the partitioning of France, Duchamp soon left Arcachon and traveled to the house of his other sister Yvonne and her husband Alphonse in Sanary-sur-Mer, near Marseilles, where he would stay for nearly two years, joking that he had returned "home." There he attempted to resume normal life.

Throughout this tumultuous period of German invasion and his consequent displacement, and from within its very midst, Duchamp continued work on *La boîte-en-valise*, his "box in a suitcase": "I am even able to work. I have a good printer and am making headway on my album," he wrote from Arcachon.⁴ The box would contain a collection of sixty-nine reproductions of his

own past artwork, which, begun in 1935, would be serialized over the next three decades in an edition of more than three hundred, twenty of which, so-called "deluxe versions," were placed in leather valises. "My whole life's work fits into one suitcase," Duchamp later explained.⁵ By 1941, after assembling the majority of reproductions, Duchamp found that living conditions had worsened, prompting his decision to leave France for the United States. But first he had to transport materials for the project from occupied Paris to the unoccupied south of France where he could ship them off to New York. In the spring of 1941 he made three trips between Paris and Sanary, while awaiting visas for travel to the States. In order to cross Nazi checkpoints without drawing attention to his infamous artistic identity, which might have put him at risk at a time when collaborationist Vichy France was purging its enemies of the state, he disguised himself as a cheese merchant and shuttled a large suitcase containing material for the *Boîte*. Its portable structure seems to have anticipated such journeys. "I thought of a scheme," Duchamp later recalled:

I had a friend, Gustave Candel, who was a wholesale cheese merchant in Les Halles, and I asked him if he could commission me to go and buy cheese for him in the unoccupied sector. He gave me a letter, which I took to the German authorities, and with that letter and a bribe of twelve hundred francs I got from a secretary that famous little card, called an *Ausweis*, which allowed me to travel by train from Paris to Marseilles. I thought I had to be very careful and buy cheese, and probably give an account of my expenses when I crossed the border between two zones, but the Germans never asked me any questions.⁶

Duchamp then brought the materials to Grenoble and shipped them as “household effects” with Peggy Guggenheim’s art collection to New York, where he would later continue working on the assembly of the boxes. After gathering the necessary and extensive paperwork for emigration to the United States—required were Vichy exit papers, a valid passport, U.S. visa, and transit visas for any country passed through on the way—he finally set sail for New York on May 14, 1942.

Walter Benjamin also escaped Paris in May 1940, after clearing out his apartment, packing up a suitcase, and having Georges Bataille store his notes for the unfinished study of the nineteenth-century Parisian arcades, the *Passagenwerk*, and various essays, including copies of “Berlin Childhood around 1900” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in the Bibliothèque Nationale for safekeeping.⁷ He had been living in Paris as a refugee since 1933, when, endangered as a Jew, he escaped Germany after the Nazi seizure of power. By 1939 Benjamin was officially stateless, after the German authorities revoked his citizenship once the Gestapo discovered an essay he had written in 1936 and published in the Moscow journal *Das Wort* (although this new status did not prevent him from later being interned in Paris as a German alien for nearly three months). By 1940, already “afflicted” by a seemingly perpetual search for a “home” that did not exist, he joined five to six million other refugees, many of them Belgians and French fleeing the Nazi advance, and left Paris, traveling by train to Lourdes, in the Pyrenees, and then, two months later, on to Marseilles. An emergency visa awaited him, which Max Horkheimer had arranged from the U.S. consulate, but Benjamin had failed to obtain a French exit visa, newly required owing to restrictions recently enacted by the collaborationist Vichy regime. After a month of anxiously waiting without being able to secure the necessary documents, Benjamin



1.1 Marcel Duchamp, *La boîte-en-valise*, 1941. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Peter, and Paul Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp.

took a train to the countryside near the Spanish border, and from there, out of desperation, decided to make the crossing through the Pyrenees mountains with a small group of refugees to enter Spain illegally. Because of his poor health, he could only walk for ten minutes at a time, then stop for one, yet he refused to let anyone else carry his suitcase, which contained, he said, a “new manuscript” that was “more important than I am.”⁸ He successfully made the passage only to discover upon arrival in the Spanish border town of Portbou that, with the sudden and unexpected changes in immigration law common in those days, he would not be admitted to the country without the outstanding exit visa and was to be sent back the following morning to the German authorities in occupied France. Unwilling to accept this fate, he committed suicide with an overdose of morphine in his hotel room. Ironically, his travel companions were allowed to enter Spain, perhaps owing to the tragic example set by Benjamin.

Benjamin’s possessions, handed over to the court in Figueras at the time, were described as follows: a leather briefcase like businessmen use, a man’s watch, a pipe, six photographs, an X-ray picture, a pair of glasses, various letters, magazines, a few other papers whose content is unknown, and some money.⁹ These papers later went missing, along with the other contents of the suitcase, and their identification is only speculation. Could that “new manuscript” have been a draft of his “On the Concept of History” (also known as “Theses on a Philosophy of History”), on which he had been working since early 1940? Or perhaps an updated version of “A Berlin Chronicle,” later adapted into “Berlin Childhood around 1900” and published posthumously, but under preparation since 1933? Whichever the case, history had been a continual and urgent concern since his exile began, and he carefully considered it both philosophically and personally. While “Theses” meditates on the

tragic destruction of the historical past, “A Berlin Chronicle” examines the way in which the object of subjective remembrance is necessarily mediated and thus distanced by the present. There is certainly a relationship between the two losses. Benjamin confessed that the “Chronicle,” which finds a certain solace in the author’s own memories, was motivated by his exposure to homelessness: “I hope these images at least make readers feel how much this writer has been deprived of the security that surrounded him in childhood.”¹⁰ There is little doubt that this deprivation owing to personal circumstances only exacerbated the troubled relationship to the historical past registered in “Theses.” But while the collection of memories signaled the profound existential vulnerability of exile, the return to the past could also, for Benjamin, alleviate its disorientation. Remembering the home while in a state of homelessness extended a sense of security to the displaced. Benjamin’s relation to history was consequently marked by conflicting aims: to remember the home and register its loss at the same time.

We are thus faced with a striking historical correspondence between the two stories—on the one hand, there is Duchamp’s suitcase, obsessively filled with reproductions of his whole life’s work, and on the other, Benjamin’s suitcase, containing complex meditations on history and homesickness, both located within the peripatetic conditions of exile. The parallel situates the qualities of mobility, compactness, and miniaturization, as well as the impulses toward nostalgic collection and portable containment—what must be called the aesthetics of exile—within the field of geopolitical displacement during World War II. The homelessness of Duchamp and that of Benjamin were, however, far from equal. Rather, the coincidence mixes the tragic and the farcical: the story of Benjamin’s desperate attempt to escape the clutches of the Nazis as a German Jew reads in stark contrast to Duchamp’s repeated and even playful

masquerades as a cheese merchant at Nazi borders. Displacement, for Duchamp, represented a desired and productive condition, a prescription for an adventurous life of solitude: "The artist should be alone. . . . Everyone for himself, as in a shipwreck."¹¹ For Benjamin, more refugee than castaway, it was a traumatic, involuntary sentence delivered with deathly threats: In exile he was "a man at home between the jaws of a crocodile which he holds apart with iron struts."¹²

Still, the stories are illuminating in that their comparison productively differentiates the potential meanings of exile during these years. Additionally, they open up *La boîte-en-valise* to a hitherto unexamined historical field, which is integral to the suitcase's operations and to the motivations of its making. Several questions unfold from here: How and under what circumstances might a portable museum offer a refuge for the homeless? Why collect all of one's artwork, or alternatively, assemble one's memories, in the midst of displacement? More broadly, how might Duchamp's suitcase connect the aesthetics of displacement to a resistance to nationalism, joining the geographical and political casts of exile to oppositional ends? How might it then function as an antidote to the fascist celebration of "the blood and soil" of the fatherland and to its ideology of the home-as-nation? And how, finally, might the conditions of geopolitical dislocation relate to the material, institutional, and technological displacements of modernism and modernity, on which the *Boîte*—as a museum of photography—also reflects?

Living in exile at the same time, Theodor Adorno was amazingly perspicacious about its conflicts, and his wartime writings illuminate the meaning of exile during those years. Under what conditions, Adorno asked, might there exist a "refuge for the homeless"?¹³ For him, the paradoxical status of exile—a condition of ethical choice as well as circumstantial necessity—was measured in the impos-

sible relation to living spaces and possessions. He argued that the "house is past" for two reasons. The first owed to the dehumanizing developments of advanced capitalism, which had created "living-cases manufactured by experts for philistines," and "factory sites that have strayed into the consumption sphere," both "devoid of all relation to the occupant." No one could inhabit such environments and live as a human being. On the other hand, one was prohibited from seeking refuge in tradition, such as moving into a "period-style house," for there the owner "embalms himself alive" in nostalgic regression. This was unacceptably escapist because it would deny the second reason why the house is past: "The bombings of European cities, as well as the labour and concentration camps, merely proceed as executors, with what the immanent development of technology had long decided was to be the fate of houses. These are now good only to be thrown away like old food cans."

In other words, by the early 1940s, the house had become a dehumanized architecture set within both the reifying economy of domestic consumption and a war zone of industrialized death, a fate that announced a horrific convergence between capitalist homogenization and the fascist extermination of difference. At the center of this convergence was the home. The only answer for Adorno was a homeless existence, making "the enforced conditions of emigration a wisely-chosen norm." But when the system of proliferating commodities defies all attempts at their limitation, and when one must still have some possessions in order to avoid the descent into abject dependency, even homelessness is compromised. "The nostalgia for independent existence, defunct in any case, is sent packing."¹⁴ Adorno was finally at a loss: there is no refuge for the homeless.

Adorno's grim conclusion exposes the desperate circumstances surrounding what he termed the "paradox" of existence in

the early 1940s, a desperate time when “Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.” Wrongly, life was precariously posed between a dispersion that placed the very coherence of the self in jeopardy and a compensatory urge that tempted a suicidal self-embalming. Benjamin was certainly aware of this, and while Duchamp may not have shared these exact circumstances, responded to all of Adorno’s concerns, or agreed exactly with his conclusions, he was not entirely free of those described pressures and conflicts either. For *La boîte-en-valise* reacts to a similar set of paradoxical conditions: it betrays the impossible desires for the home in a period of homelessness, and for objects when possessions have been lost. Moreover, it displays a longing for an independent existence in an era of fascist domination, growing artistic institutionalization, and exile’s desperation. The astonishing aspect of the *Boîte* lies in its ability to reveal this crisis of a life become paradoxical, and to operate within its terms. In the process of precariously traveling within this conflicted terrain, seeking out an independent existence even while realizing the impossibility of finding refuge for the homeless, Duchamp formulated a remarkable and innovative artistic structure capable of critically addressing exile in its full historical complexity.

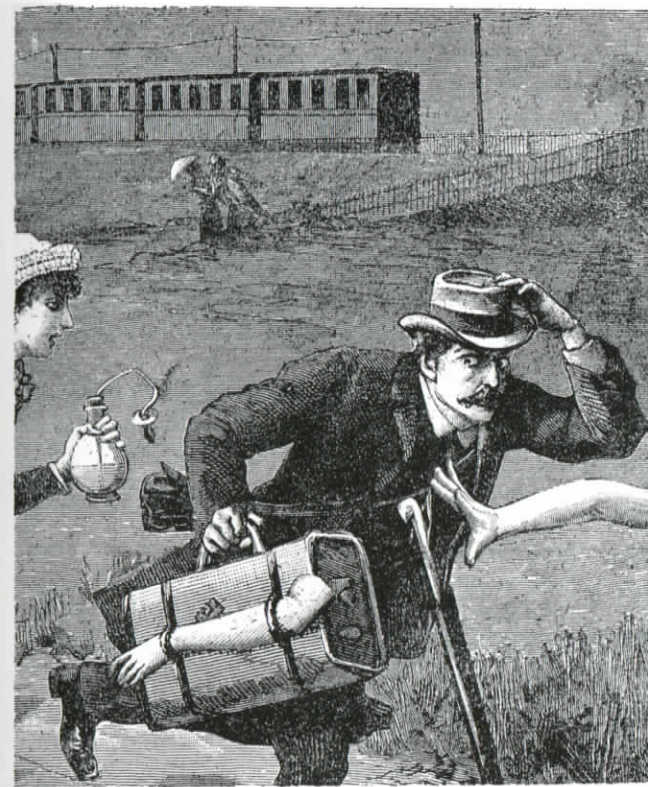
Although Duchamp commenced *La boîte-en-valise* before the events of 1940, he had lived as a voluntary nomad for the majority of his adult life. Embracing an internal mobility as much as an itinerant residency, he escaped the pressures of traditions and the limitations of place-bound cultural conventions. “[N]either completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, [the exile] is an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another,” Edward Said notes, following Adorno’s own insights.¹⁵ Such a description comes close to Duchamp’s own position during these years, between outcast and mimic, and correlates

perfectly with the suitcase’s priorities of the nostalgic collection of memory-objects and easy portability, which satisfied the needs of exile.¹⁶ Duchamp’s suitcase clearly served multiple functions and extended to exile a complex definition: It meditated upon the existential vulnerability of homelessness, as we shall see, but also offered the means to combat the fragmenting effects of exile through the reconstruction of a portable home built upon the assembly of photographic reproductions. More than simply combating the fragmenting force of dislocation, the suitcase also carefully draws on that very power in order to free itself from the institutionalization it at once internalizes and acknowledges. Creating an innovative artwork that escapes all traditional categories, it also proposes the means by which Duchamp modeled a form of subjectivity that freed itself from the strictures of an increasingly claustrophobic national identity, the evasion of which is brilliantly exemplified by Duchamp’s cheese merchant slipping through the regulatory mechanisms of Nazi borders.

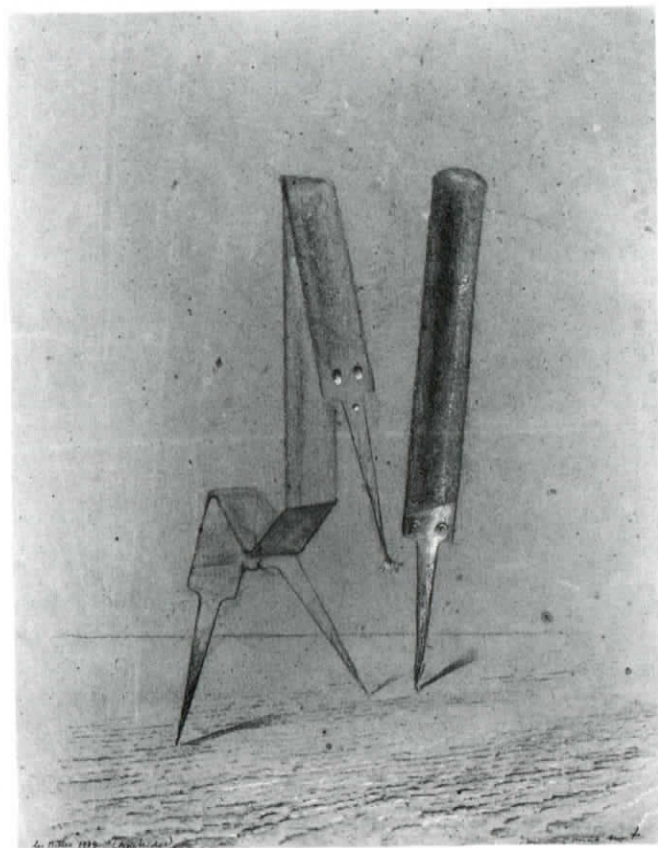
In addition to its flight from nationalism, Duchamp’s project breaks away from the two dominant European avant-garde paradigms of displacement forwarded during the inner-war period: surrealism’s long-standing art practiced under the sign of the uncanny (defined by Freud as the *unheimlich*, or unhomely), which exacerbated dislocation through representational experiments; and the German Bauhaus’s ideal of an architectural internationalism, which unmoored itself from regional specificity through the embrace of the language of modernist abstraction. The viability of the surrealist position, well worn by 1940, eventually faded in the face of war and exile. Surrealism had tapped into the psychically troubled relationship to the home, indexing repressed memories of the maternal body in order to decenter the self and unleash a desublimatory energy of disorientation through shocking artistic means.¹⁷

But over the years, it ultimately fell prey to the dangers of escapist tendencies, long present within its own theories, by refusing to acknowledge the surrounding institutional framework of its artistic practice, as when, for instance, it failed to register the contradictions in carrying out a surrealist revolution within the bourgeois salon. Meanwhile, the Bauhaus model lost credibility as it transformed into a free-floating, apolitical style, courting in turn communist patrons, the Nazis, and, when these were refused, U.S. corporate interests, yet all the while neglected to complicate or render critical its relation to this mobility.¹⁶ Its roving architectural style would soon function as the very image of global capitalism.

Still, in terms of the first formation, some surrealists, such as Max Ernst, did attempt to move from the art of the psychic uncanny to one that confronted geopolitical homelessness, carrying the aesthetics of displacement to the register of exile and antinationalism. Living as a German émigré in France and later in the United States before and during the war, Ernst addressed his uprooted condition through his collage books, including *La femme 100 têtes* of 1929. In one image, decontextualized fragments from old illustrated magazines recombine into a representation of a harried man, grasped at and menaced by other fragmented limbs, running with a suitcase onto which is morbidly strapped an amputated arm. The scene dramatically captures the experience of bodily dispersion and psychological desperation that exile may bring. Uncanny elements run continuous with the disorientation of geographical dislocation, as the decontextualization that is structural to collage allegorizes the encounter with homelessness. We also come across meditations on the displaced conditions of subjectivity in later works of Ernst, such as *Les milles-apatrides* (The Stateless Thousands) of 1939, with its uprooted compass needles that find themselves lost in a barren environment. But while these images thematize geopolitical



1.2 Max Ernst, *Défais ton sac, mon brave*, from *La femme 100 têtes*, 1929. Courtesy Special Collections of the Sheridan Libraries of The Johns Hopkins University. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



1.3 Max Ernst, *Les milles-apatrides*, 1959. Courtesy Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Graphische Sammlung. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

displacement, they paradoxically fall back on well-established pictorial models emphasizing the *centering* effects of traditional composition, secure viewing points, and orienting perspectival constructions. They share in the dialectics of homelessness, precariously balancing between revealing the conditions of displacement and shoring up its disorienting effects, but their reliance on traditional surrealist pictorial strategies limits the reach of their analyses; for none interrogates the deeper links between geopolitical displacement and the artistic construct stratified by the dislocations wrought by institutionalization, reproduction, and distribution, as is found in Duchamp's *La boîte-en-valise*.

Duchamp's project is provocative just where these other models fall silent: at the point where geopolitical displacement is imbricated with the developing paradigms of the museum and photography. Duchamp, of course, called *La boîte-en-valise* his "portable museum" and its contents were filled with photographic reproductions. This is perfectly appropriate, for in the structures of the museum and photography we encounter the twin engines of decontextualization, even while both provide the very means of recontextualization. It is not surprising, then, that Duchamp turned to them most fully at this time, for they open precisely onto the liminality and contradictions located in the relay between the exposure to loss and the desire for recovery, which defines the experience of homelessness. Just how Duchamp negotiated the terms of exile through the structures of the museum and photography represents a complicated logic that needs to be carefully unpacked.

On March 5, 1935, Duchamp thought up the "new idea" of producing "an album of approximately all the things I produced."¹⁰ He later explained, "[H]ere, again, a new form of expression was involved. Instead of painting something new, my aim was to reproduce the

paintings and the objects that I like and collect them in a space as small as possible. I did not know how to go about it. I first thought of a book but I did not like the idea. Then it occurred to me that it could be a box in which all my works would be collected and mounted like in a small museum, a portable museum so to speak."²⁰ Certainly not restricted to the negotiation of exile, the *Boîte* is a complicated project that unfolds in various directions—most obviously toward a new conceptualization of photography, the museum, and the techniques of collection and presentation. Duchamp himself was reticent about identifying any single motivating factor for his project, and it makes sense to follow his cue.²¹ The most convincing reading of *La boîte-en-valise* to date views it as representing Duchamp's attempt to critically address the institutionalization of the avant-garde, meaning the process by which the transgressive practices of the early-twentieth-century artistic formations came to be officially validated, categorized historically and stylistically, reproduced and commodified, and consequently domesticated by collectors and publishers, art galleries and museums. As Benjamin Buchloh writes:

As usual, the reflection upon the origins of the artist's concern to integrate within the conception of a work, the final forms of distribution and the conditions of reception and acculturation, the modes of reading that ensue from them and that are contained within the practices of institutionalisation, has to take its point of departure in a reference to the work of Marcel Duchamp. Undoubtedly his description of the origins of the portable museum *La Boîte-en-valise* . . . reveals his anticipation of the final destination that his oeuvre would reach in the immanent process of acculturation: the museum.²²

Buchloh's thesis, couched in an analysis of the postwar conceptual art of Marcel Broodthaers, takes up Peter Bürger's argument regarding the difference between a historical avant-garde that sought to overcome the institutionalization of artistic practice, and a neo-avant-garde that succumbed to it, whereby Duchamp's practice is positioned as a critical hinge between the two.²³ The originality of Buchloh's position, however, is to argue that Duchamp's mid-career work, which uniquely transcended the divide between the two avant-gardes, not only recognized the inevitability of institutional pressures, but acted to internalize them in advance as a strategy of cagey resistance. This is a compelling reading for sure. Though not limited to a single example or date, the effects of institutionalization on Duchamp's work were more than evident by 1936, and it certainly must have been clear to him even earlier. The "original" *Fountain*, displayed in 1917 and then immediately lost, offers an early story of acculturation, as it only came to be known through its institutional and discursive reproduction.²⁴ One could, of course, argue that from the first the readymade represented a recognition of the acculturation and reification of the art object in the commercial market. Yet the readymade itself as an artistic object had yet to succumb to its own paradoxical institutionalization, which opens up to the project of *La boîte-en-valise*.

It was during the 1930s that Duchamp in fact encountered an explosion of exhibitions that included his work, more than at any other earlier point in his career as an artist.²⁵ To cite a single instance, he encountered the institutional acculturation of the readymade when his *Bottle Rack* was displayed in a glass vitrine in the Exposition surréaliste d'objets at La Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris, 1936, a show that predates the radical surrealist experiments with display techniques in the late '30s and early '40s. A contradiction was here made apparent: Once scandalously rejecting

traditional categories of the original art object, of artistic identity based on craftsmanship, and of the role of the museum as a supposed neutral space of exhibition (the impossibility of which was demonstrated by the debacle of the *Fountain* in the 1917 Independents' exhibition), the readymade *Bottle Rack* now sat as a seemingly rare, historical, and valuable *sculpture* in an art gallery. This represented the generalizing subjection of radically heterogeneous objects to a homogenizing exhibition space. Duchamp's derisive reaction to such repositionings, as in the case of the postwar reception of Dada, is telling: "When I discovered the readymades, my intention was to thwart the aesthetic. The Neo-Dadaists have seized hold of my readymades and they find in them aesthetic beauty. I threw in their face the *Bottlerack* and the urinal as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."²⁶ One might argue that this outcome represented less a *contradiction*—between the readymade and its institutional placement in the traditional category of "fine art"—and more a *realization* of the very principles of reification that constituted the readymade in the first place—that of the commodity form, the logical terminus of modern art in the age of modern capitalism. Yet the degree to which the gallery, in the context of a surrealist show, was then capable of exhibiting this deconstructive maneuver that was the readymade, and aestheticizing it in turn, is remarkable.

La boîte-en-valise, Duchamp's "portable museum," reconstructs this very system, self-administering the institutional forces on his own works of art. Its museum-like layout, reproduced status, and presentation techniques clearly reveal the effects of this preprocessing. The *Boîte* has its own case for transport. Its miniaturized reproductions, reduced for easy mobility, already anticipate museum postcards. When its partitions are folded out, it creates a miniature wall of display, on which its artworks hang and are



1.4 Exposition surréaliste d'objets
at La Galerie Charles Ratton, Paris,
1936.

clearly identified in terms of title, date, and collection printed on small paper labels, all neatly categorized and arranged. In other words, the box fully reenacts the museum's educational mission, curatorial techniques, and organizational procedures as its own mode of artistic production. It is truly a "musée-en-valise," collapsing the museum institution into a single suitcase.²⁷ Like the Ratton exhibition of the *Bottle Rack*, *La boîte-en-valise* transposes readymades into works of art, initially by grouping their miniature reproductions in the same categorization as those of conventional artworks, such as paintings and sculptures. This shift from ready-made to acculturated object is perfectly illustrated in the difference between the 1917 *Fountain* and the *Boîte's* miniaturized, finely crafted version of it, which has been serialized and vertically reoriented—as if hanging on a wall—in its new display.²⁸ The *Boîte*, mimicking the museum, transformed the *readymade* into a *sculpture* and then into a *reproduction*, rehearsing the institutional fate of avant-garde art. The "portable museum" functions as a kind of machine of acculturation, in effect a *readymade museum*, which subjects objects to a standardized and preestablished set of economic, pedagogical, administrative, curatorial, and art-historical conventions.²⁹

As such, the precedent of Duchamp's portable museum has served as a crucial resource for subsequent avant-garde developments, specifically those practices critical or analytical of the institutional forces that would organize and govern artistic categories, including those of authorship and display conventions, which would come to determine the art object's meaning and value. For instance, the work of Broodthaers—including the packing crates and postcard reproductions of his "museum fictions," as well as his various suitcase pieces—is frequently said to be indebted to Duchamp in its decoding of artistic form as the reified shell of the institutional act of physical displacement, recontextualization, and



1.5 Marcel Broodthaers, *Hotel*, 1975.
© 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York/SABAM, Brussels.

revaluation. Yet the interpretation of the *Boîte* presented in such readings—as an engagement with institutional acculturation—certainly does not exhaust its operations, and moreover, the terms of its comparison to Broodthaers’ practice need to be questioned. Whereas Buchloh ultimately argues that Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise* “seems to fail to maintain any claim for autonomy and rupture in favour of a complacent, melancholic and passive contingency upon the conditions of rule that it set out to disrupt,” we must wonder why it too doesn’t “vanquish myth from inside,” avoiding a “parodic fetishization,” as does the work of Broodthaers.³⁰ In addition, we must avoid the potential ahistorical instrumentalization of the *Boîte* that occurs when it is construed merely as a model for subsequent practices and seen only in their historical terms, thereby closing Duchamp’s suitcase prematurely.

While *La boîte-en-valise* certainly adopts various institutionalized conventions, these coincided historically with a specific reformulation of the museum. Duchamp conceptualized and assembled his museum roughly at the same time that André Malraux was rethinking his own, and there are several similarities between the two projects. Beginning in 1936, after reading Walter Benjamin’s seminal article on art in the age of mechanical reproduction,³¹ Malraux began to consider the promising possibilities of transforming the museum from a geographically determined collection of original objects, traditionally organized by national schools (as in the Louvre), into a virtual display of cross-referenced photographic reproductions contained within a free-floating book. This new model would represent a postarchitectural museum, one that exchanged walls for pages, and its effects would be significant. As Malraux’s “museum” undertook the reproduction of art objects, it would uproot them from their historical or national ground and reorganize them along purely stylistic lines.³² Mechanical reproduc-

tion encouraged the grouping of objects from disparate geographical and temporal contexts according to formal criteria, and such transhistorical and cross-cultural comparisons proliferate throughout Malraux’s text: in one typical instance, he compares a photograph of a thirteenth-century sculpture of an angel’s head from Rheims Cathedral to another of a sculpted Buddha from fourth-century Gandhara.³³ As a result, artistic identity is subsumed under a metaphysics of style. The real motors of art history, for Malraux, were not artists, but “those imaginary super-artists we call styles.”³⁴

Malraux’s *Musée imaginaire* explains what his museum performs: the disconnection of the original object from all aspects of its historical field and the subsequent definition of its artistic meaning by stylistic identity. *La boîte-en-valise* shares the *Musée*’s system of miniaturized reproductions that have been decontextualized from any historical context beyond the tracing of cross-cultural and transhistorical stylistic developments. As a mobile museum of photographic reproductions contained in a suitcase, it is also an idiosyncratic enactment of Malraux’s museum without walls. The major difference—one to which we will later return—is that Duchamp’s museum retains a monographic organization, something Malraux’s model dispenses with in favor of a hypostatization of style. By staging a *retrospective* exhibition, Duchamp’s museum props up the institution of authorship that gives body to a subject behind the work, a function that takes on special significance, as we will see, within the context of exile.

More broadly, Malraux’s museological development participates in the related historical movement of art objects toward a heightened condition of deracination, a state Rosalind Krauss has provocatively termed “modernist homelessness.” As modernism progressed in the first quarter of the twentieth century, it gradually severed ties to historical specificity, iconographical reference, and



1.6 André Malraux with photographic plates for *Le musée imaginaire*, circa 1950.

national assignment, links that would otherwise variously locate its objects within a particular geographical and cultural framework. Modernism thereby approached the formal condition of itinerancy, which is exemplified, for Krauss, both in abstract art and in Duchamp's readymades of the 1910s. Brancusi's works became nomadic at the moment when the sculpture internalized its base, the sublation of which was one of his major artistic achievements. By absorbing its pedestal, the sculpture unlinks itself from its actual place and thereby enters into a potential state of free-floating and autonomous mobility.⁵⁵ Similarly, the readymade is constituted by the transplantation of a commodity object from a worldly context into the realm of art, an action that renders the readymade transparent to its structural significance and meaning.⁵⁶ In both cases, the artwork enters "the space of what could be called its negative condition—a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place. Which is to say one enters modernism."⁵⁷ This sitelessness, in turn, characterizes the smooth space of the modernist museum, with its galleries increasingly divided by freely mobile display partitions, which finds a parallel articulation in Malraux's "museum without walls," with its manipulable pages, stylistic organization, and portability.

Despite the stylistic diversity of the objects that it groups together, this underlying logic of modernist homelessness also defines the earlier experimental containers of Duchamp, such as the croquet box that held *Three Standard Stoppages* of 1915, and the Box of 1914, which utilized a commercial photographic supply container and housed an early collection of reproduced notes. The Box of 1914, released in an edition of five, and an important precedent for *La boîte-en-valise*, includes photographic facsimiles of sixteen manuscript notes and a drawing, *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* (1914), mounted on mat board and collected in a cardboard box, which

retained its original label, such as “Kodak: Bromure Velours” or “Lumiere & ses Fils: Plaques au Gélantino-Bromure d’argent.” Duchamp explained to Cabanne in 1966: “For the ‘Box’ of 1913–14 . . . I didn’t have the idea of a box as much as just notes. I thought I could collect, in an album like the Saint-Etienne catalogue, some calculations, some reflexions, without relating them. . . . I wanted that album to go with the ‘Glass,’ and to be consulted when seeing the ‘Glass’ because, as I see it, it must not be ‘looked at’ in the aesthetic sense of the word.”³⁸ Not only was the 1914 Box’s container a remarkable case of commercial-packaging-turned-readymade, but its assembly of notes was based on a department store catalog, specifically the Saint-Etienne to which Duchamp refers, as modernist homelessness joined with the appearance of capitalist exchange and the aesthetic indifference that approached the blasé experience of consumerism.

Although initially reliant on Benjamin’s model of photographic reproduction, Malraux’s project, especially in its later culmination, also reveals radical differences from it, and in turn, forks away from the project of Duchamp. For Benjamin, photography was revolutionary because it cancels the aura that surrounds the original artwork, encouraging a critical distance from the reproduced image and therefore a newfound independence for its audience. The political urgency of this mode of address is clear in the age of fascism’s “aestheticization of politics,” the pacified audience of which was mesmerized by a continual stream of ideological aura. Malraux, however, ignored Benjamin’s considerations of these shifts in reception brought about through photography. Rather, he viewed the import of photography as contained within a new technology of *distribution*. As Malraux explained: “today we find that if the masses do not go to the art, technology inevitably brings the art to the masses.”³⁹ Photography, for Malraux, promotes a significant

widening of public access to works of art, whether they be paintings *or* readymades, and such a promise forms the basis of his humanist understanding of reproduction. *Le musée imaginaire*, conceived in the 1930s and fully published by 1947, signals the moment when the museum, paralleling the deracinating logic of modernism, merged with the postwar developments of liberal humanism and advanced capitalism.⁴⁰ The reconfigured “imaginary” museum would offer new nonterritorial possibilities for collective solidarity through technologically expanded cultural experience and consequently transnational opportunities for the development of new markets. Malraux’s museum predicted a postnational, universal, and humanist culture, rising out of the ashes of the destruction of warring nationalisms of World War II. “In the movement which brings works of art and knowledge toward a greater and greater number of men,” Malraux explained, “we intend to maintain or recreate, not permanent and particular values, but . . . humanist values. Humanist because universalist. Because, myth for myth, we want neither Germany nor Germania, neither Italian nor Roman, but man.”⁴¹ After the war, however, this desire was increasingly directed toward a universalism paradoxically placed under national patrimony. As the new Minister of Information for de Gaulle’s reconstructionist government, Malraux proposed a plan to distribute “culture” to the general population by reproducing one hundred masterpieces of French painting and displaying them in French schools.⁴² Ultimately, far from being inherently nonterritorial, the technology of reproduction could easily serve the interests of the state.

Against Malraux’s faith in the redemptive value of technology and the museum achieved through the democratic distribution of reproductions, and against the implications regarding the new metaphysics of subjectivity of a new postnational “man,” others

writing at the same time were deeply skeptical. Adorno and Horkheimer, for instance, saw in modern reproduction not the catalyst of liberty, but the probability of increased means of domination, where “myth” cloaks ideology and culture disassembles industry: “the ‘culture industry’ demonstrates the regression of enlightenment to ideology,” they argued. “Here enlightenment consists above all in the calculation of effectiveness and of the techniques of production and distribution.”⁴³ This “calculation of effectiveness,” obtained through “the techniques of production and distribution,” was perfectly exemplified by Malraux’s industrialization of culture achieved through photographic reproduction, which joined enlightenment to ideology in his imaginary museum. It remains a question, however, what interests were served and what effects were released by Duchamp’s internalization of museum conventions. Could *La boîte-en-valise* have performed this internalization only as a self-defeating act of mimicry, or for its own critical purposes, even as a means of survival for Duchamp’s own independent existence? It is precisely against these models of the humanist negation of difference and the culture industry’s homogenization of identity, both specters raised by Malraux, that we must reconsider Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise*.

Modernist homelessness, like institutional acculturation, only goes so far in comprehending *La boîte-en-valise*, and this is where the historical coincidence of the suitcase stories of Duchamp and Benjamin becomes particularly provocative, pointing toward new interpretive possibilities. The parallel, which dramatizes the relation of the *Boîte* to *exile*, repositions the suitcase within the field of *geopolitical homelessness*.⁴⁴ The suitcase, in this context, responds to the transitory existence of the subject in exile, an experience that adjoins the uprooting tendencies of capitalism, artistic institution-

alization, and photography. This redefinition of homelessness suggests why it was only in 1941, in the state of forced displacement, that Duchamp first conceived of placing the *Boîte* in a leather suitcase, thus initiating the “deluxe” version of *La boîte-en-valise*. When asked by an interviewer, “Why a suitcase? It is obviously ready to be carried off somewhere,” Duchamp equivocated: “What would you consider the proper solution?”⁴⁵ But only when placed in a portable box were the reproductions fully equipped for the exigencies of travel, that is, as a suitcase for a refugee. It is thus necessary to reposition *La boîte-en-valise* at the point where institutional acculturation intersects with Duchamp’s own exile.

The value of Benjamin’s story, and particularly the way in which he treated exile in his writing, is that it dramatizes the connection between *modernist homelessness* and *geopolitical homelessness*, whereby each is expressed through the other. Exile entered into Benjamin’s writings through its inscription in the aesthetic structure of modernism, which his work advanced in its own way. It was in fact partly through the principles of montage and allegory, which Benjamin considered at length, that he negotiated his own displacement. Like Adorno’s theorization of exile, Benjamin’s writing in exile, specifically “A Berlin Chronicle,” defined a system of contradictory desires, which was a function of implacable loss. Benjamin responded to homesickness by collecting images that substituted for a lost past or forbidden land, but he also resisted compensatory and nostalgic temptations that would regressively reconstruct an imaginary home. Ultimately, Benjamin’s “Berlin Chronicle” confirms Adorno’s realization: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.” Yet this home, stored in Benjamin’s suitcase, was as illusory for him as it was for Adorno: “The demand that one harden oneself against self-pity implies the technical necessity to counter any slackening of

intellectual tension with the utmost alertness, and to eliminate anything that has begun to encrust the work or to drift along idly, which may at an earlier stage have served, as gossip, to generate the warm atmosphere conducive to growth, but is now left behind, flat and stale. In the end, the writer is not allowed to live in his writing."⁴⁰ Benjamin reached similar conclusions.

"A Berlin Chronicle" tells the tale of the author's memories of a "lived Berlin" doubly lost to him—through both the passage of time and the ravages of exile. Throughout the text he yearns to "evoke the most important memories of one's life," those initial and formative experiences, such as learning the meaning of the word "love," first hearing the "accent of death" on a name, or the earliest stirrings of sexual desire.⁴¹ If the "Chronicle" is threaded through with the signs of homesickness, he was, however, never enthralled by nationalism; he yearned not for Germany, nor, of course, for its mythically imagined community bound by nationalism, nor even for the prefascist nation.⁴² Rather, Benjamin recollected images of a personal and familial past, his own subjective home built of his earliest experiences now lost to him. Giving in to homesickness was a precarious danger, wherein one risked an overwhelming nostalgia that would idealize the past and reject a critical relationship to the present. Benjamin was sensitive to these dangers and tried hard to resist such temptations because it was the very nostalgia for the home, particularly enlarged to the idea of the home-as-nation that enabled National Socialism's appeal. "One reason why Fascism has a chance," Benjamin noted, "is that in the name of progress it is treated as a historical norm."⁴³ Fascism had rewritten the past to position itself as its inevitable endpoint. In response, it was urgent to contest fascism's historicism. This could only be done by uprooting history, by placing it overtly in a constitutive relation to the present, so that fascism could no longer be treated as

the ineluctable result of historical progression. Even in his last desperate months, in the shadow of world war, Benjamin believed that "to bring about a real state of emergency" and "improve our position in the struggle against Fascism" it was necessary to obtain a new "conception of history."⁴⁴ It was for this struggle that Benjamin risked his life to deliver his suitcase to safety.

In addition to the grandly metaphysical and gnomic aphorisms on history presented in his "Theses," Benjamin also carried out this struggle, modestly, through the recollection of his own past in "A Berlin Chronicle." Against idealist approaches to memory that viewed it as an already completed experience waiting to be recovered by recollection, Benjamin defined memory as fluid and contingent upon its materialization according to desires and needs in the present. In returning to his childhood while in exile, he consequently attempted to satisfy homesickness self-consciously in a controlled way: "I attempted to limit it by becoming conscious of the irremediable loss of the past."⁴⁵ Memory represented a "boundless horizon opening in my imagination," but he reminded himself that "this vista would indeed be delusive if it did not make visible the medium in which alone such images take form . . . the present in which the writer lives is this medium."⁴⁶ By revealing this "medium"—by identifying the time of writing, by announcing his authorship, by wrapping remembrance up reflexively in its rhetorical articulations—he rendered memory porous to the present, thus inoculating himself against the overwhelming desires of homesickness, even while giving in to the longing to return to the past. Indeed, "Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater."⁴⁷ His homesick writings would be *homeopathic*: "Just as the vaccine should not overtake the healthy body, the feeling of homesickness was not about to overtake my mind."⁴⁸ In other words, his "new conception of history"

was advanced through a set of self-reflexive terms continuous with modernist representation.

Benjamin's historiography merged the logics of modernism and exile, both opposed to fascist homeliness. He considered photography and film, his theoretically privileged visual mediums, as postauratic precisely because their images were no longer *rooted* to any site. There was neither original object nor cultic context to mystically absorb the viewer. Reproductions consequently became *homeless* representations: free-floating, they existed in no secure location, geographical or temporal: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."⁵⁵ As such, his dialectical system of history took on political value in that it contested the fascist naturalization of the past, which corresponded to its ideological attempts to return to the "blood and soil" of an essentialized communal identity. The value of Benjamin's modernism was its thoroughly transitory identity, and the tropes of exile float throughout his writings.

With emerging reproductive technologies, subjectivity, according to Benjamin, became increasingly touched by new forms of placelessness: the filmed actor, paragon of modern subjectivity, was homeless, and "feels as if in *exile* . . . With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice . . . in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence."⁵⁶ The thematics of exile proliferate in earlier essays, too: In "A Short History of Photography," Benjamin views Atget's photographs as "swept clean like a house which has not yet found its new tenant," and surrealist photography as establishing "a healthy alienation between environment and man."⁵⁷ Within his "Berlin Chronicle" this logic is personalized.

Benjamin, the exiled subject, records his own homesick memories as dislocated montage, arrayed within a cycle of continual particularization: "He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside."⁵⁸ By derealizing the object of memory through the segmentation of its reproduction, Benjamin both satisfied and restricted homesickness. This points once again to the complex and contradictory demands of Benjamin's strategy. Returning to childhood memories protected against the total dissolution of the self in exile, just as it preserved the self against the desubjectivization operative in modernism's logic of deracination (a threat that Malraux redressed by an eventual return to a form of national identity). But Benjamin also relied on, by embracing these same decontextualizing strategies of modernism and homelessness to avoid the regression and historicism of fascism. The aesthetics of modernist exile, then, offered the means both to satisfy homesickness by shoring up identity through a memorial project, and to challenge fascist historicism by resisting its essentialism through a homeless aesthetic. It was his turn to a flexible model of homeopathy, where the disease is used against itself to limit its dangerous effects, that allowed Benjamin to negotiate this double bind.

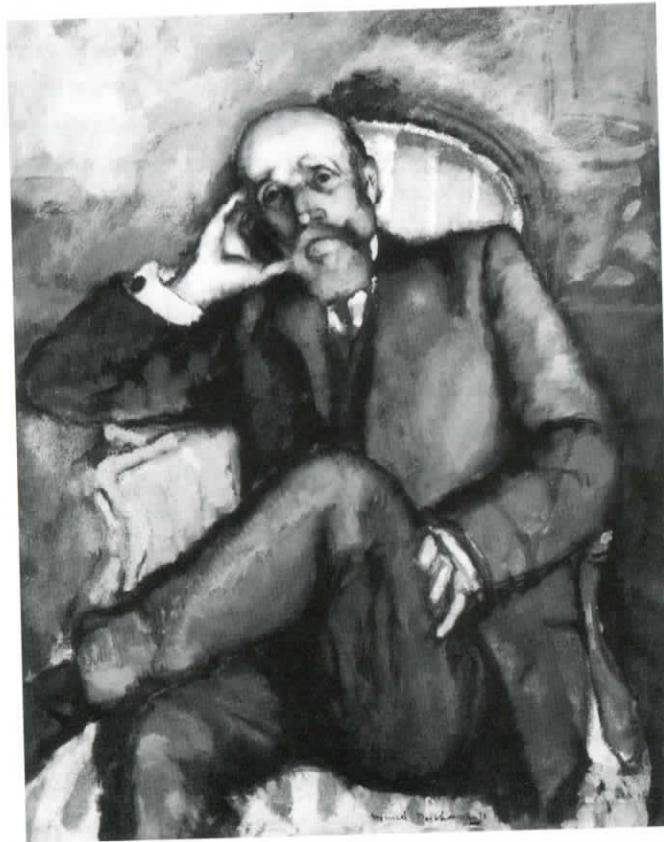
We return to the coincidence of the two suitcases: Just as Benjamin returned "home" in exile through his retrospective writing, so did Duchamp through a return to his past works of art, to his "whole life's work." From the early paintings to the readymades, from the *Large Glass* to the *Rotoreliefs*, *La boîte-en-valise* summoned a collection of reproductions that acted as a kind of family album. The gathering of these works engendered a meditation on past relationships, personal and familial activities, earlier formal investigations,

and dialogic exchanges with other artistic formations and aesthetic models. The earliest works, from 1910 to 1911, represented intimate domestic encounters, picturing family members at Duchamp's childhood home in Blainville, near Rouen. *Sonata* and *The Chess Game* showed his brothers and sisters assembled together playing music or games. There was the portrait of *Dr. Dumouchel*, *Portrait of Chauvel*, and *Apropos of Little Sister*, all painted in anachronistic, pre-cubist styles not yet subjected to rigorous fragmentation. *Bateau-Lavoir* and *Church at Blainville* represented the regional area of Duchamp's childhood. Later works, such as the *Large Glass* and *Tu m'*, returned to the significant artistic contributions of his career. The box enacted a reunion, bringing together all his works and family members vicariously. It's not that a referential clarity groups these works together, many of which participated in an attack on illusionism; rather, because of the heightened sensitivity to loss that marks it, exile provides an optic that brings Duchamp's subjective attachment to the represented figures from his earlier life into greater focus.

With Duchamp reproducing objects from his past, and with Benjamin narrating his, it is evident that exile leads to a crisis in memory.⁶⁰ Isolation from a familiar site, especially from one's home, brings about a rupture from history, which in turn exacerbates the fragmentary experience of dislocation. Troubled by the loss of secure lived space and by the disrupted connection to the personal relationships and material possessions that would otherwise provide continuity with the past, the exile returns to memory, the enactment of which consequently becomes a stabilizing force. Remembrance restores some sense of security to an identity experiencing disorientation. The crisis of memory, in Duchamp's case, would be alleviated by photography, which is particularly suited to address the desire for the past. Uniquely situated to stand in for its

referent, to create the closest simulation of its original model, the photograph creates a *physical* connection between viewer and image, reestablishing a link to the past. As Roland Barthes explains, "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. . . . A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."⁶¹ Because the photographic connection offers this existential proximity to the lost object, it is not surprising that photography would be among the items in a displaced person's suitcase—as they were in Benjamin's as well. Duchamp himself explained how returning to his early work while constructing the box represented "a wonderful vacation in my past life . . . [a] vacation in past time instead of a new area."⁶²

Photography would show its captured object as if reincarnated, unlike film, whose unstoppable progression exiles its representations to a vanishing ephemerality, as Benjamin observed. Duchamp's *Portrait of the Artist's Father* of 1910, intimate and psychologically introspective, and contained in *La boîte-en-valise*, exemplifies this "carnal medium." It shows an image of Eugène Duchamp, whose death in 1925 occurred within a week of his wife's, gazing out into the viewer's eyes. But it is clear that he is depicted looking not at any anonymous person but at his son, and the intimacy of the visual connection between painter and father, reaffirmed by the compassion of the gaze and the penetrating focus, is palpable. Duchamp claimed that it offered an "illustration of my cult of Cézanne mixed up with filial love."⁶³ Painted in a representational idiom still attached to traditional referential functions and expressive content, works like this one would likely become nostalgic in 1940, in terms of both the intimacy of their subjects and their outmoded styles, an elision



1.7 Marcel Duchamp, *Portrait of the Artist's Father*, 1910. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Peter, and Paul Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp.

that was registered in the division of Duchamp's "filial love" between his father *and* Cézanne, a subject *and* style both lost. Through the photographic reproduction he could recapture and possess the painting otherwise out of reach. Serving a family album, *La boîte-en-valise* offered an archive to which Duchamp could freely return, "a sort of umbilical cord" between him and his past.

A number of questions unfold from here: how successful can a memorial project be that is based in photographic reproduction, where mnemonic functions may be overtaken by the fetishization of the past? To what degree is Duchamp's homesickness reflexive, like Benjamin's, avoiding a facile escapism or an unproblematic compensation? While Duchamp's reproductions establish a *corporeal* connection between viewer and referent, photography's mediated condition also works *against* such closure which is clear in Duchamp's usage. If the box's reproductions served the homesick desire to replace a lost object, then this lost object must itself be understood as already split between two referents: the original object (e.g., the painting of Duchamp's father) and its own referent (Duchamp's father). Any ultimate origin is already located within a complicated chain of doublings, progressing through painted and photographic mediations before becoming available to the *Boîte*'s archive. Like Benjamin's memory, the object of Duchamp's memory dislocates itself in the medium of its reproduction. And the medium of reproduction is photography, whose structure is defined not only by a form of exile (as according to Benjamin), but also by the fetishistic *denial* of displacement in the first place. No doubt the two are related, like two sides of the same coin. The aspect of denial is pointed out by Siegfried Kracauer, who famously noted that "What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it all the more."⁶⁵

We can see that the reproductions of Duchamp's suitcase were similarly situated. They capture artworks lost through museological distribution; but once photographically reproduced, these works are only displaced again through their hypermediated condition. The more something is lost, the more energy is expended in its recapture. What results is an obsessive series of replications, a fetishistic multiplication seemingly without end, evident in the decades-long *Boîte* project as a whole, which, in its totality, amounts to an edition of nearly 300 boxes with more than 22,000 reproductions in all. The point is that *La boîte-en-valise* was poised both to satisfy memory as well as to announce the cyclical pursuit of its impossible reconstitution. Homeopathically, it gives in to homesickness and the reconstitution of the self, but then reveals these to be effects of reproduction, beginning the cycle once again.⁶⁴

The desire to replace the lost object generated a complementary urge that drove Duchamp to physically return to as many of his original objects as possible to study them for reproduction during the late 1930s. It also generated their careful hand-based reproduction. In order to transform the black-and-white photographs (which were most often made by hired professionals) into the finished color versions, Duchamp traveled to the originals, which were distributed across the United States and France, making detailed notations on their color. These notations would be used to color the reproductions by hand back in France. In 1936, after soliciting photographs from his various patrons, he sailed to New York to see Katherine Dreier's collection, traveled to Hollywood to consult the Arensbergs' holdings, and stopped off in Cleveland on the way back to examine *Nude Descending a Staircase*, where it was temporarily on loan. It is not surprising that at times Duchamp would become tired of being a "perpetual tourist," as he confessed in 1934.⁶⁵ Duchamp perhaps became weary of the geographical dispersal of his

self through travel, which came to double the institutional dissemination of his objects, even while that travel was motivated by the impulse to reunite the work in the *Boîte* project.

The process of reproduction was complicated and was not new to Duchamp. He first employed photography to make a substitute artwork in 1913, when he recreated *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* for Walter Arensberg, who had missed out on purchasing the original at the Armory show earlier that year. At that time, Duchamp used watercolor, ink, pencil, and pastel over a black and white photograph to recreate a full-scale, hand-colored replica of the original, which he signed "Marcel Duchamp [Fils]," indicating that it was the "son of" *Nude, No. 2*. For the coloring of the *Boîte's* reproductions, Duchamp employed the *pochoir* technique, an anachronistic, cottage-industry procedure, which required the time-consuming hand-coloring of each print by the use of stencils. By doing so, he avoided the excessive cost of color photography. But what resulted was an intensive artisanal process. "The time required for obtaining a satisfactory first print is about a month for a highly skilled craftsman," Duchamp explained. "An average of 30 colours is required for each plate. . . . [It takes] seven or eight weeks to apply 30 colours by hand through stencils."⁶⁶ The notes for *Sonata* were typical, where Duchamp's color notations carefully fill in the different areas of the template. However, whenever possible, Duchamp did not hesitate to use high-quality reproductions from magazines or books directly in *La boîte-en-valise*. For instance, the color images of *Dr. Dumouchel* of 1910 were first photographically reproduced and hand-colored for the early boxes; later editions used the color gravure reproduced in *Lectures pour tous*, which Duchamp simply cut out of the magazine.⁶⁷ In other words, reproductions went both ways, serving both *as* and *for* the original. From artwork to reproduction and back again, they

dispersion. Barthes also found a compensatory maneuver in early photography, the coloring of which represented “an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses).”⁷¹ In other words, retouching, painting the surface of a black-and-white photograph restores the illusion of life to a dead body. Hand-coloring not only blurs distinctions between originality and reproduction, but as such it further intensifies the replicatory ability of photography. The coloration acts to deny—even if impossibly—the reality of photographic reproduction and decontextualization, which, after all, had sundered Duchamp’s oeuvre, in favor of the presentation of seemingly original handmade objects. While photography displaces the original by substituting for it, hand-coloring paradoxically restores a sense of aura. But rather than rehearsing the opposition of *either* original *or* reproduction, the condition of the *Boîte*’s images proposes a liminal status *between* painting and photography. Duchamp here explored the very relay between the two, a relay put to task in the negotiation of the dialectic of displacement and replacement that broadly defines his project. Moreover, this logic parallels Benjamin’s own elaboration of memory and homelessness in a writing that is neither regressively auratic nor completely decontextualized, but exiled somewhere in the double-negative space between the two.

We would be right to ask why Duchamp—the exemplar of avant-garde nomadism, the paragon of an independent life, and the creator of the paradigmatic artistic model of displacement, the readymade—would concern himself with the *monographic* organization of his works of art in a single collection.⁷² Why go to such lengths to contain all his life’s work in a *single suitcase*? Rather than viewing his newfound obsession for collection simply as a resigned capitulation to the realities of institutional acculturation,

or as an inexplicable, perhaps compensatory, backlash against the structural paradigm of displacement that organizes his earlier work, it makes sense to read the practice of collection as a further response to the historical conditions of geopolitical dislocation, one that was also rather nuanced and reflexive. The fact that Duchamp’s own homelessness was at its most intense during the construction of *La boîte-en-valise* encourages us to read it as an answer both to the dislocation of his artwork and to his own displacement. Indeed, the two are inextricably intertwined. For Duchamp, the realization of the corpus of his work, reassembled through handmade photographs and housed in the suitcase, became a way to limit homesickness and subjective dissolution in a way similar to Benjamin’s collection of childhood memories. Like Benjamin, the threatened dispersion of homelessness is checked by Duchamp’s vicarious reconstitution of the self through the process of collection and containment, abetted by photography and the museum.

What reveals the profound subjective investment in *La boîte-en-valise* is not only its photographic condition, but its obsessive collecting, corroborated by Duchamp’s own conspicuous comments that responded to the feared dispersal and loss of his artwork. In the process of requesting that Walter Pach sell *Sad Young Man on a Train* to Walter Arensberg, for example, Duchamp explained: “I would like this painting (if it is to part from you) to go and join its brothers and sisters in California. I am still convinced that because my output is limited, my things should not be subjected to speculation, i.e. traveling from one collection to another and being scattered about, and I am certain that Arensberg, like myself, intends making it a coherent whole.”⁷³ The familial links between artworks, bound together to fend off the divisive onslaught of market speculation, were also imagined as corporeal connections protecting against the morbid parcelization of art that occurred through its

dissemination: "Exhibiting one thing here and another there feels like amputating a finger or a leg each time."⁷⁴ Such comments as these betray Duchamp's psychic attachment to his past work, indicating an identification between his sense of physical self and the perceived body of his artistic corpus, which comes a long way from the original "indifference" according to which the first readymades were reputedly chosen. Correlatively, the perception of his work reassembled in a single retrospective (as at the Tate Gallery in 1966) offered visions of bodily reparation, even an image of triumph over death: "When your memory's warmed up, you see better. You go through it chronologically; the man's really dead, with his life behind him. It's a little like that, except I'm not dying! Each thing brought up a memory. No, not at all. It was simply being laid bare, kindly, with no bruises, no regrets. It's quite agreeable."⁷⁵ What was at stake in such identifications? And how might the obsessive collecting of *La boîte-en-valise* repair or alternately exacerbate these fears of fragmentation?

Walter Benjamin once again provides answers. Considering his "Berlin Chronicle" a kind of "collection," Benjamin suggested in his *Arcades Project* that the act of collecting responds precisely to the anxiety of dispersion, and moreover that at its most regressive levels it betrays a nostalgic desire for the home.⁷⁶ The collection signifies an "abridged universe," "a nest," which serves a "biological function" in protecting against the fragmentation of the outside world: "Perhaps the most deeply hidden motive of the person who collects can be described this way: he takes up the struggle against dispersion. The great collector, at origin, is affected by the confusion and the scattering of things in the world."⁷⁷ The *space* of the collection may also become expressive of this longing. The container—Benjamin referred to it in French as a "boîte"—represents "the originary form of all habitation," and the desire for it indi-

cates "the human being's reflex to return to the maternal breast."⁷⁸ Collection, Benjamin realized, is not merely about the assembly of things; it compensates for the perceived fragmentation of the collector himself. Its "biological function" represents his own autocircumscription. The collection, then, neutralizes the sitelessness of decontextualization, even while its act of assembly motors the very cycle of displacement in the first place. Even while it decontextualizes, the collection—or archive, which derives from the Greek term *arkheion*, meaning house or domicile—evinces "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement," notes Jacques Derrida.⁷⁹ However, that said, Derrida points out that the archive is constituted by the inevitability of mnemonic loss. The death of memory, in other words, is both premise and consequence of archival desire. The collection organizes itself around the mutually informing conflict between memory and loss, between decontextualization and relocation, which identifies both the structural paradox of and homeopathic solution to homesickness.

In terms of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, what specifically countered the anxiety over displacement is its monographic organizational principle. "I wanted the *whole body of work* to stay together," says Duchamp, emphasizing his wish to conserve the totality of his corpus.⁸⁰ His so-called boxed monographs carried this out.⁸¹ While the monograph represents an institutionally ordered organizational system, seemingly devoid of choice or personalization (one places *everything* in it, theoretically obviating any decisions based on personal preference), it also serves as the model that guides Duchamp's process of identification. This identification, equating artist's body and artistic corpus, is driven by two monographic effects: one that secures a sense of the totality of its structure; the other that concretizes Duchamp's authorial identity. Both act to shore up the self

through the fetishization of the collection. If the fetish's fundamental function is to replace a lost object, then this ultimately responds to the anxious desire for the reparation of the fragmented or "amputated" body (as in Freud's classic definition, according to which the fetish serves as supplement or substitute to the perceived castration of the mother). This definition closely approximates Duchamp's identification with the corpus of his collection, where personhood became physicalized and concretized through familial or corporeal relations to reproduced objects and their monographic assembly in a circumscribed space. Through this correlation between artistic corpus and physical self, the *Boîte*'s collection fended off threats of dispersion, intensified in Duchamp's own displacement, by reconstructing a body both materially and psychically. The *Boîte*'s fetishism, however, is certainly multiple: it replaces the object lost to the market and institution; it reunifies the psychically fragmented self of the artist; and it restores the home lost to the displaced person. What results is an investment through objects that multiply around loss, materializing a self whose coherence is paradoxically impossible, which drives the process in turn.

The monographic collection, in addition, determines the space of the suitcase, shrinking its contents to a custom fit. While the miniaturization of the *Boîte*'s contents has been read as a duplication of the effects of commodification,⁸² it also remains the necessary condition for the containment of Duchamp's corpus of work within the single space of a portable suitcase. In other words, miniaturization and containment effectively allow the corpus to be perceptible as a single, complete, portable body, which offers a (momentary) resolution to the anxiety over fragmentation. Moreover, miniaturization is what connects the perceived totalization of Duchamp's oeuvre (as an undivided body) to its nostalgic function; for, if the placement of the corpus within a single suitcase entails

its miniaturization, then this material condensation signals the very form of nostalgia. It is not surprising to find in phenomenological studies of space and scale that the miniature object leads back to a domestic space of intimacy and childhood, proposing a personal and tactile relation to the individual beholder. "The tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys and the reality of toys," writes Bachelard.⁸³ Similarly, *La boîte-en-valise* is eminently playful, inviting the physical manipulation of its contents and the discovery of its various compartments, offering a welcoming intimate space. The reproductions become like toys in the hands of the viewer, similar to playing with a doll's house. In fact, "the miniature typifies the structure of memory," according to Susan Stuart, for "there may be an actual phenomenological correlation between the experience of scale and the experience of duration."⁸⁴ Objects reduced in scale appear to recede in time. Miniaturization, in other words, indicates psychic investment, often regressive, and temporal remove—the two ingredients of nostalgia.

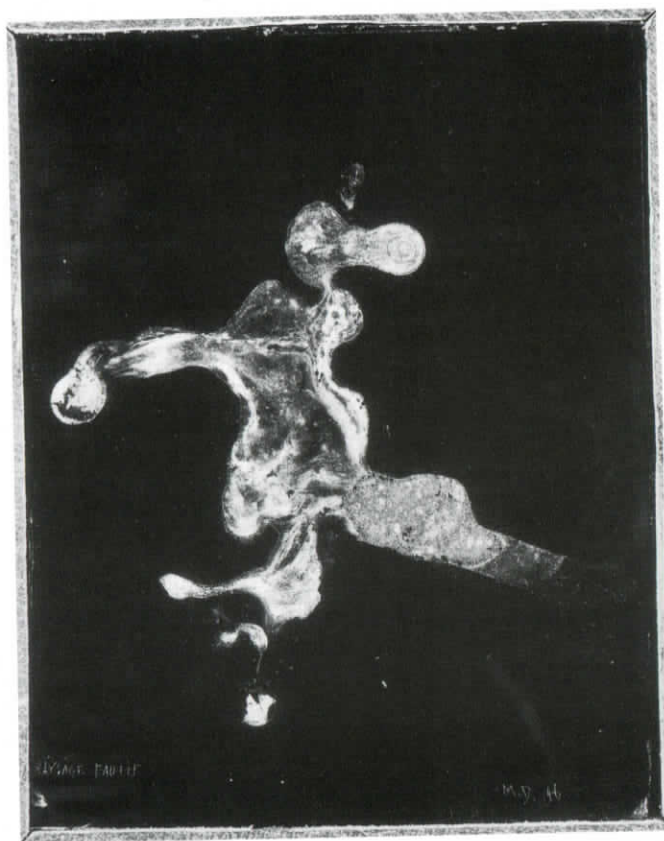
Consequently, the *Boîte-en-valise* suggests a complex and interrelated division between its decontextualized institutionalized condition, which is deeply depersonalizing, and its monographic identity, which is subjectively reparative. It cannot, in other words, simply be collapsed into a melancholic and desubjectified double, and indeed it is crucial to seize hold of its important subjective functions.⁸⁵ Duchamp's use of the museum reveals a strategy adjacent to what Benjamin theorized as the "antinomies of the allegorical," where objects are transformed within new framing conditions (such as the subjective requirements of exile lodged within an imitated museum's architecture), or even merged into the setting, into the structure of the artwork, in order to gain a new purchase on life: "If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if

melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power."⁸⁶ If Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* mimed the depersonalizing museum under the gaze of melancholy, then it did so to paradoxically bring its contents back to life under the control of its author. Consequently, Duchamp's "boxed monograph" cannot ultimately propose a facile repetition of Malraux's museum. Seeing it as such would fail to explain how the monographic logic, retrospective urge, and fetishistic replication became engaged within Duchamp's own physical dislocation and experience of homesickness. The monographic system actually clarifies the suitcase's refusal of the complete decontextualization that occurs in Malraux's *postmonographic* museum, which abandons any sense of subjective cohesion or artistic identity, beyond its abstract notion of "man." The monographic shores up authorial selfhood against the experience of its fragmentation, meaning the dislocation of its objects within the market or within the institution, as well as the geopolitical displacement of the exiled subject. Indeed, these various functions are interconnected, which is the achievement of Duchamp's portable museum.

In 1946, Duchamp fabricated two deluxe editions of *La boîte-en-valise*. Coming late, these versions may seem peripheral to the project, but in fact they reveal its fraught structure most dramatically. Each case includes a unique artwork. The first piece, *Untitled*, created for a suitcase for the surrealist painter Matta, shows a schematic diagram of a figure. Duchamp made it by brusquely taping human hair to a Plexiglas support, each clump positioned to correspond to the appropriate anatomical areas of a body indicated by a lightly penciled outline. The second work, made for Maria Martins, a love interest of Duchamp's at the time, is *Paysage fautif*,

an abstract "landscape" whose title translates both as "faulty" and "dirty." Considered faulty, its amorphous shape, positioned beyond any horizon line and outside any recognizable space, fails to represent even the slightest suggestion of a landscape. It is dirty in the scatological sense, because Duchamp created the formless image with his own semen. He preserved the globular mass on Astralon backed with black satin. Uniting masturbatory urge and painterly gesture, *Paysage fautif* parodies the extravagant rhetoric of abstract art, particularly its New-York-School variety, with its claims of paint flowing from the body as if directly from the source of the unconscious. It makes the riff through a hilariously and obscene act of literalization, Duchamp's "semen spill" performing a perverse mimicry of what would soon become Pollock's signature drip painting technique. "It's olfactory masturbation, dare I say," Duchamp commented. "Each morning a painter, on working, needs apart from his breakfast, a whiff of turpentine. . . . A form of great pleasure alone, onanistic almost."⁸⁷ Yet, viewed within the broader historical context of 1946, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, one can see in these two works both the recognition of the obliteration of the human subject, rendered unrecognizable by the inhumanity of the war, and the parody of the narcissistic desire to create art in the wake of the recent genocidal catastrophe.

Considered from within the logic of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, these pieces advance further the multiplication of the artist's body initiated by its photographic reproduction and museological accumulation, procedures that materialized a lost corpus and recovered a cohesive object of identification. *Paysage fautif* and *Untitled* answer to the same fetishistic desires as the larger *Boîte* project, even furthering the connection to Duchamp's own body by emerging as fluid and matter directly from it. The "umbilical cord," in Barthes' words, that extended the psycho-photographic link



1.9 Marcel Duchamp, *Paysage fautilf*, 1946. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Peter, and Paul Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp.

between artist and object, here becomes literally physicalized. In the process, *La boîte-en-valise* comes to suggest a bizarre phantasmatic body, one circumscribed by a leather skin, framed by a complicated system of joints, divided into interior organs, pulsating with fluids, growing hair, and containing a photographic memory bank. With each suitcase signed “*of or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy*,” the latter Duchamp’s feminine alter ego, this identificatory blur between author and object is explicitly stated. The *Boîte* must thus be considered as created *by* its maker and *of* his/her own body, rendering apropos its title.⁸⁸

Although these bodily traces facilitate Duchamp’s construction of *La boîte-en-valise* as phantom self, conjuring a morbidly unified body that harmonically combines genders, they equally reveal its profound division; for the pieces of semen and hair expose the ultimate and grotesque sign of physical decrepitude and fragmentation, the exiled body scattered across suitcases, through mediums, between institutions, and in reproduction. While the portable museum proceeded to collect and document even the most intimate belongings of its author, it seems that this did not stop Marcel Duchamp/Rose Sélavy from perversely gaining enjoyment out of projecting his/her own body into the flux, or at least signifying the pleasure gained through the carefully cataloged results of masturbation. This revelation of enjoyment—“a form of great pleasure alone”—complements the reading of Duchamp’s complex relation to his dispersed condition. While the *Boîte*’s fragmentary status expressed the physical insecurity of exile as well as its institutional decontextualization, its dislocation also prompted the ecstatic parceling of the body, which stimulated onanistic pleasures. Against the fetishistic urge directed toward physical cohesion witnessed earlier, here we confront the very desire for the dismemberment of the self. Was this desire for annihilation a

masochistic surrender to the body given over to institutionalization, or a sign of the enjoyment of the fetishistic act itself? Or might this controlled self-division have been yet another mode of homeopathic inoculation, one put to task in Duchamp's own interests against and within exile?

"Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows," write Deleuze and Guattari of the body that is subjected to the demands of capitalist exchange at the behest of an urge that pushes its fluidity to the ultimate limits of schizophrenic abandon: "flowing hair, a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit, or urine that is produced by partial objects and constantly cut off by other partial objects, which in turn produces other flows, interrupted by other partial objects. Every object presupposes the continuity of a flow, the fragmentation of the object."⁹⁰ Existing within a similar physical flux, the nomadic body of the *Boîte-en-valise* indicates the pleasures of the disarticulation of the self, which escape the dreary submission to institutionalization. Such pleasures are bound up with the destruction of the coherence of identity, leaving a flexible self pledged to itinerant desires. In this sense, exile suggests a mode of being in the grips of becoming, one that, in the case of the *Boîte*, defines an independent traveler who has transgressed the regulations of traditional identity, including its gendered codes, national loyalties, and ideals of physical cohesion. Duchamp pushed the flux of exile to ecstatic intensities beyond institutionalized order.⁹¹

However, the options for liberation and self-invention were continually threatened in turn by institutional capture, all too evident in the highly structured format of the suitcase. The *Boîte* clearly refuses the abstract freedom of the nomadic, especially where it expresses an unreflective optimism in its ability to dissolve the solidifications of dominant conventions and identities; for Duchamp

realized that institutional co-optation and reification were not so easily overcome. In this light, the experimental self-portraiture performed by the valise represents a historically updated version of that of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, which also positioned its author, "MarCel," as divided between fragmentation and instrumentalization, between ecstatic unity and thwarted desire, and between female and male halves corresponding to the upper and lower panes of glass, the spaces of the MARIÉE and the CÉLIBATAIRES, the bride and the bachelors.⁹¹ This figuration, of course, was also a disfiguration; for the *Large Glass* deconstructs identity and rebuilds the body through a mechanical schematization of the desiring subject, which, in mapping out psychosexual zones, intricately divides bodily functions. Moreover, while it entices the viewer with orgasmic fusion—promising what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "a schizophrenic experience of intensive qualities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable"—it ultimately offers only the frustration of desire—"a celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death."⁹²

This frustration, which is productive of desire in the first place, derives from the fact that, although MarCel enjoys the pleasures of disarticulation, she/he is already submitted to the modern regimes of industrialization that retool the body as machine, albeit one that Duchamp renders dysfunctional. The *Boîte*, like the *Large Glass*, reveals that its fragmentation is not simply liberatory, but also caught up in the ongoing process of institutionalization and reproduction. Nevertheless, Duchamp found in this experiment more than the prison of mechanical objectification and scientific control; he also discovered the potential for a transgressive identity that attempted to push beyond the limitations imposed by traditional institutions, thereby inventing his own kinds of *jouissance*.

Nowhere is this transgression more strikingly dramatized than in the image of Duchamp disguised as a cheese merchant passing through Nazi checkpoints. Certainly it was the *Boîte*'s paradoxical status—mimetic yet singular—that allowed its owner to dissimulate its identity, which was at its heart mobile and discontinuous. It was only appropriate that this extraordinary meeting should take place at the border, which figured as both the rigid boundary of the nation's territory and the fluid portal onto exile. There, two radically different formations confronted one another: nationalism and banishment. Whereas the nationalist imagined himself as physically whole and ideal, exemplified in so many grotesquely monumentalized bodies whose armored physiques only betrayed the paranoia of dissolution in the first place,⁸⁵ Duchamp's construction committed itself to the exiled body. By reflexively opening up the desires for both mnemonic cohesion and fetishistic reproduction, for both a completed corpus and physical flux, Duchamp negated any simplistic expression of homogeneity and unity and refused the facile regression to a vicarious home. Luckily, Duchamp successfully passed through the Nazi border, leaving us with a remarkable articulation of the paradoxes of exile. Through it, Duchamp gained his independence, which was in turn sent packing.

Duchamp's critique of nationalism, however, was not limited to the easy targeting of fascism. In New York in 1943 Duchamp made a portrait of George Washington. Constructed out of gauze soaked with iodine, the image unites the profile of the first American president with the geographical border of the United States. But this is no official portrait. It suggests a wounded body brutally impaled with long nails, each driven through a golden star, wrapped in bloody bandages. A series of oppositions tears its surface between unification and fragmentation, between the symbols of the nation (the flag, the country, the president) and their



1.10 Marcel Duchamp, *Genre Allegory*, 1943. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Peter, and Paul Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp.

metonymic dispersion (as dismembered part objects). Not surprisingly, it was rejected by the editors of *Vogue* magazine, who commissioned it as a patriotic image for the cover of a special issue on Americana in the midst of World War II. What repulsed them was, no doubt, the sordidness of the portrait, contained in the fact that it pierces the patriotic order, destroys its borders, and attacks its subject. *Genre Allegory* materializes the violence hidden behind the homogenization and essentialism of national identity, in which the desire for collective unity is fulfilled at the cost of bloody fragmentation. We recognize its logic from *La boîte-en-valise*.

2 SCULPTURES FOR TRAVELING